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COAST GUARD SUPPORT OF USSOUTHCOM MISSIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

COAST GUARD SUPPORT OF USSOUTHCOM MISSIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The purpose of this paper is to examine the potential for the U.S. Coast Guard to perform as the defacto U.S. naval force in Central America in support of SOUTHCOM maritime missions. Due to the limited U.S. Navy presence in Central America, there are maritime oriented national security missions which are currently either not performed, or performed at a level which leaves significant room for enhancement.

This paper begins by reviewing the historical and geo-political aspects of Central America as they pertain to U.S. military and political involvement there. Using the National Security Strategy and National Military strategy as a basis, it then identifies the current maritime oriented SOUTHCOM missions in Latin, and specifically Central, America. Shifting to a review of historical Coast Guard mission and naval support efforts, the study attempts to identify clearly supportive reasons for the Coast Guard to be the primary U.S. naval force in Central America.

Implementation of this idea would be mutually beneficial for U.S. national interests, host nation national interests, and Coast Guard service interests, while filling an increasing absence of a U.S. maritime presence in the region caused by changes in the world order and the subsequent large and rapid reductions of DoD, and Navy, resources.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
ABSTRACT	ii
I INTRODUCTION	1
II THE CENTRAL AMERICAN "SITUATION"	5
History	5
U.S. Intervention	7
Self Determination	8
III SOUTHCOM MISSIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA	11
U.S. National Security Strategy	11
SOUTHCOM'S Strategic Objectives	13
SOUTHCOM'S Nation Assistance	15
IV COAST GUARD SUPPORT TO SOUTHCOM	17
Historical Coast Guard Naval Support	17
Coast Guard Mission Areas	19
Why Central America?	21
Why the Coast Guard?	24
V CONCLUSIONS	28
APPENDIX I--CENTRAL AMERICAN NAVIES/PATROL FORCES	31
NOTES	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	38

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COAST GUARD SUPPORT OF USSOUTHCOM MISSIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR) includes the landmass of all countries south of Mexico with the exception of French Guiana, but has no blue water responsibility. That portion of military responsibility lies with USACOM, whose blue water mission, in effect, surrounds the SOUTHCOM AOR. Although, in theory, SOUTHCOM's maritime vulnerability is "covered", it is so fulfilled by another CINC, significantly decreasing the impact SOUTHCOM has on U.S. naval forces in its AOR, while dividing the host nation military training and cooperation mission. In essence, SOUTHCOM works with the land and air forces, while USACOM has the responsibility for U.S. forces which work with their navies.

In the third world, establishing ties with host nation military forces to build regional security is a slow process, requiring a patient, long-term approach.¹ While many Third World countries want to be autonomous, their diversity, size, and lack of development require that they rely on the more developed world for military and economic security.² In Latin America, and particularly Central America, U.S. involvement and intervention over the last 170+ years has created a climate ranging from mistrust and apprehension to outright fear toward the presence of U.S. military forces.

The rapid and unexpected end of the Cold War presented the U.S. with a rare opportunity to completely reassess its foreign policy, including alliances and foreign aid.³ With the current drawdown of DoD, the ability of the United States to deal with two regional contingencies simultaneously has to rely on stability of the security situation "back home", yet the Central American nations, our "backyard", are all in varying degrees of transition from repressive military dominated regimes toward full democracy. These nations, particularly their military officers, require constant guidance, encouragement and security as they build their new political and military establishments.

The current U.S. involvement in Somalia reflects a significant change in employment of U.S. forces from previous administrations, which avoided direct military involvement in the internal affairs of other nations. As part of establishing the post-Cold War "New World Order", the U.S. is expected to increase its use of military forces in support of U.N. and regional security operations, while simultaneously decreasing the size of the military, including its primary power projection asset, the Navy.⁴ This steadily widening gap needs to be filled.

The numerous insurgencies and civil wars that have occurred throughout Central America since the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 are all coming to an end.⁵ The military forces in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua have

been, for the most part, removed from active fighting as democratically elected governments negotiate with the insurgents and their representatives. The situation has similarly settled in Belize, Honduras, and Costa Rica, where the insurgencies of the other three countries threatened their individual and collective security. However, the Army Global Forecast (AGF), a service level threat estimate of possible contingencies facing U.S. military forces in the future, sees Central America as the most likely region for U.S. contingency operations in the future, due to the combination of the endemic drug trafficking problem, as well as the possibility of rekindled civil wars and insurgencies.⁶

With the exception of Costa Rica, which has no military, the armed forces in Central America have traditionally been the power behind the governmental throne, and the occasional holders of that throne.⁷ The military establishments are the best organized power group, though professionalism and support for democracy is a fairly recent occurrence. Only since the end of WW-II have there been any serious attempts to change. Therein lies the current conundrum in Latin, and particularly Central, America. While many fear U.S. hegemony in the region, there is an equally strong demand for U.S. intervention to force the military regimes to fully yield to civilian control.⁸

During peacetime, the Department of Transportation is charged with ensuring that the Coast Guard is prepared to

serve as part of the Navy in time of war, however, the Coast Guard may perform military functions in support of limited war or defense contingency without actual transfer to the Department of Defense.⁹ The purpose of this paper is to explore how and why the Coast Guard can fulfill the role of SOUTHCOM's naval force in interacting with the navies of the Central American countries.

CHAPTER II
THE CENTRAL AMERICAN "SITUATION"

History

To adequately explore naval support to Central American countries requires an understanding of the unique history, sensitivities, and politics of Central America. The primary consideration is the question of what constitutes "Central America." Historically and traditionally, "Central America" has referred to the territory of the Kingdom of Guatemala, from which the Spanish were driven in 1821. This territory included what is now Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and the Mexican state of Chiapas. Neighboring Belize is a former British colony with a separate history, and Panama was historically part of South America, having been strong-armed from Colombia by the United States in 1903 to insure U.S. control over the Panama Canal.¹⁰ For the purposes of this paper, however, I refer to "Central America" as including all seven countries geographically located between Mexico and Colombia, as they share many of the same current threats and concerns. Similarly, when I refer to "Latin America," it is as the culture of which Central America is a subset.

Critical to an understanding of the root of unrest in Central America is the relationship between the people and the land. Although there are some limited natural resources including oil and nickel, the main economic resource of the

region is the soil and the people who farm it. Although there are plenty of people to work the land, and plenty of land available for subsistence farming, throughout this century the small, primarily European elite class has concentrated ownership of the land to themselves, while converting the crops from subsistence foods (beans, corn, rice) to export cash crops (sugar, coffee, cotton).¹¹ The force enabling the rise to, and retention of, power by the elite class has been the Central American armies, an artificially developed middle-class "praetorian guard" which insulates the "haves" and their wealth from the "have nots."

The enlisted ranks in Central America armies have traditionally been a source for poor youths to find meaningful employment and education, neither of which they would otherwise hope to achieve. High performing enlisted members earn promotion to NCO and a career. The officer corps has similarly been the source of opportunity for the middle class, with sons frequently following their fathers in a virtual "caste" system, in which boys choose a military career as early as age of 11.¹² These career military officers and NCO's are indoctrinated into a military system with special rights and privileges, and thus have a vested interest in supporting the elite political leadership. As has often been the case, however, when the elite fail to exercise what the military considers proper leadership, or threaten the

privileges of the military, they are removed by the military leaders, who then assume power for varying periods of time.

When discussing or dealing with Central America, then, the power and importance of the military as a factor in virtually every aspect is critical.

U.S. Intervention

Central America has been a strategic interest of the United States since the Monroe Doctrine was issued in 1823, recognizing the defeat of the Spanish by warning all Europeans to stay out of the Western Hemisphere and thus linking Latin American and U.S. security for the first time.¹³ Later in the 19th and early 20th centuries, to protect the Panama Canal and other American business interests, the U.S. continually intervened in Central American affairs, including long occupations by U.S. Marines until the 1930's, when President Roosevelt issued his "Good Neighbor Policy."¹⁴ Although the "Good Neighbor Policy" ended active U.S. military intervention in Latin America, short term military contingency operations, as well as covert activities in Guatemala (1954), Cuba (1960) and Chile (1973) have continued whenever U.S. interests were perceived to be threatened. In the military interventions in the Dominican Republic (1965), Grenada (1983), and Panama (1989), a U.S. premise for intervening was the protection of U.S. citizens, though little actual threat to U.S. citizens existed.¹⁵ Latin Americans see these interventions as threats

to their sovereignty, which they value above all else.¹⁶ In Panama, for example, although most Latin American leaders were glad to see Noriega removed from power, they condemned the U.S. intervention as a violation of Panamanian sovereignty which reduced the Panamanian military to a police force and returned responsibility for Panama's defense to U.S. control.

Self Determination

Since the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century, Latin Americans have continually fought for self determination. For the past 100 years, the U.S. has been seen as the chief impediment to independence, despite or because of the economic and cultural dependence of Latin America on the United States.¹⁷

In the post-WWII period, Latin America has increasingly sought to establish its collective and individual identity. Virtually all Latin American States signed the **Rio Pact** in 1947, a mutual assistance treaty which termed an attack on any member as an attack on all. This spirit of collective security spirit carried over to the creation of the Organization of American States in April 1948, formed to settle disputes peacefully and fight any external aggression, while promoting democracy, economic cooperation and recognition of basic individual human rights throughout the region.¹⁸ It also sought to hold the U.S. at arm's length, as one among equals, vice the hegemonic regional power.

In the early 1980's, all five of the "core" nations of Central America were in varying stages of unrest, including the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua, which carried over into Honduras and Costa Rica, and the insurgencies in Guatemala and El Salvador. In the spirit of the Rio Pact, eight Latin American nations formed the **Contadora Group** (Mexico, Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela) and the **Contadora Support Group** (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay) seeking to resolve Latin American problems in Latin America. These efforts, championed and focused by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez, resulted in the signing of the **Treaty of Esquipulas II** in August 1987, in which all five of the Central American core nations agreed to a negotiated settlement of grievances.¹⁹ Although the Esquipulas II accords are not a panacea for Central American problems, they did reflect the serious desire of the Central American countries to decide their own futures, not the U.S.²⁰

As this century draws to a close, Central America has become less critical to the U.S. as the Panama Canal slowly loses its military and commercial importance, while the rest of Latin America has never been seen as critical to U.S. interests, except to prevent the spread of Communism. But the military and economic importance of Central America has been replaced by a moral obligation to support democratic reforms in our own backyard.²¹

Regional challenges in Central America in the near future include: the transition of Nicaragua to democracy, resolving the Guatemalan insurgency and containing it from spilling over into Mexico and Belize, rebuilding the government of El Salvador from its civil war, continuing the development of a civilian control in Honduras, maintaining Costa Rica's non-military government, and continuing the regeneration of Panama's political and defense establishments as it prepares for reversion of the Panama Canal in less than 6 six years.²²

These challenges, in addition to the regional challenges of drug production and trafficking, and environment protection, are Latin American problems but require international solutions, thus raising concerns of sovereignty. Any U.S. involvement in Central America raises the issue of sovereignty, which for Latin America, as I have shown, is a major one and a troubling one. The stress of the U.S. shadow over the region generated by over 100 years of intervention leaves a cloud of suspicion over U.S. intentions.²³ The challenge for SOUTHCOM, then, as the world order changes and the U.S. military downsizes, is to address the strategic interests of the U.S. and Central America, tempered by sensitivity to their fears of U.S. domination, in order to achieve a meaningful, productive and secure relationship, and a basis for stability in the Americas.

CHAPTER III

SOUTHCOM MISSIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

U.S. National Security Strategy

The immediate result of the impending breakup of the Soviet Union was an almost immediate shift from a bi-polar nuclear standoff to a unipolar world order with an omnipotent U.S. at its head, as evidenced by the lack of any meaningful opposition to the U.S. intervention in Panama in 1989 or the U.S.-dominated coalition in Kuwait in 1990.²⁴ Since then, with the rapid U.S. military drawdown, the global environment has continued shifting toward a multi-polar, regionally-oriented world community.²⁵ In response to these changes, U.S. National Security Strategy changed to four fundamental elements: Strategic Defense and Deterrence, Forward Presence, Crisis Response, and Reconstitution.

Forward presence of U.S. forces is expected to build nations in peacetime while facilitating rapid power projection in time of crisis. Regional CINCs are expected to anticipate potential problems in their AOR and act decisively and proactively to reduce or prevent threats to harmony in their region. Specific examples of forward presence operations include small mobile training teams and low level military to military contacts.²⁶ The image to be presented by the U.S. military is, essentially, one of a concerned cooperative comrade-in-arms teaching a fellow professional by example. Inherent in the forward presence agenda is security and

humanitarian assistance, among other things, to give the U.S. credibility and, in crisis response, the guarantee of an appropriate response to lower level threats that match the remedy with the illness.²⁷ In essence, it doesn't take a U.S. Navy warship to deal with the small boat navies of Central America. Looking at Latin America in particular, the National Security Strategy seeks to work toward civilian control over the military, nation assistance missions, and promoting of the OAS arms control agenda.²⁸

Translating the President's National Security Strategy into a road map for the U.S. military, the National Military Strategy gave the Defense Department the responsibility to: "remain engaged in support of the developing democracies and in economic and social progress throughout the region."²⁹ The document went on to say that the U.S. must be trusted by our allies to respond to crises, and tacitly promised that the U.S. response would be as part of many nations, as part of few nations (ad hoc coalitions), or unilaterally, in that order, but that the U.S. could be counted on to respond to crises.³⁰

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff's 1993-95 Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) focuses the CINCs on regional contingency planning and directs them to generate **Flexible Deterrent Options**, including non-combatant evacuations, mobile training teams, and forward presence to minimize the use of U.S. force and prevent escalation of conflicts in their AOR's.³¹ In the U.S. Navy White Paper, "...From the Sea,"

expeditionary force packages assembled by CINC's for employment in an emerging crisis were specifically directed to include Coast Guard elements where available.³² These documents create the ideal opportunity and method for SOUTHCOM to "lay claim" to the Coast Guard as SOUTHCOM's "contingency naval force"; completely trained and ready to respond, available on short notice, and located nearby in the U.S.

Author John Peters summed up the new national challenge as the strengthening of our allies against internal and external threats through indirect non-combat military engagement (medical, engineering, civil affairs) to facilitate U.S. influence while limiting involvement. By helping others to help themselves, we establish open doors that create and maintain trust and influence. Due to Central American sensitivities, another way to achieve these goals would be a low threat, non-DOD military engagement: the Coast Guard.

SOUTHCOM's Strategic Objectives

SOUTHCOM has translated the direction of the National Security and Military Strategies into 6 Theater Strategic Objectives:

1. Strengthen democratic institutions
2. Assist host nations in eliminating threats to regional security
3. Support continued economic and social progress
4. Assist host nations in defeating the drug problem

5. Ensure an open and neutral Panama canal
6. Enhance military professionalism in regional military forces³³

These strategic objectives mesh neatly with the written conclusions of the Global 93 war game held at the Naval War College 12-30 July 1993. Global 93 was chartered to identify (worldwide) critical issues to U.S. national interests over the next decade and determine changes required in current U.S. policy and strategy to achieve national objectives.³⁴ Global 93 identified U.S. strategic objectives in Latin America as:

1. a community of free, stable and prosperous nations with economic and political values based on democracy and free market principles
2. reduction of regional drug trade
3. regional initiatives to reduce population growth, protect the environment, conserve natural resources and deter migration, and
4. non-proliferation of weapons and technologies of mass destruction.³⁵

In summary, then, it is clear that the challenge in Central America is to proactively work on building military professionalism and democratic institutions, establish the confidence and trust of our allies, and then work cooperatively for regional stability, environmental responsibility, while combating the production and trafficking of drugs and drug production precursor chemicals.

SOUTHCOMs Nation Assistance

In support of their strategic objectives in Central America, SOUTHCOM has employed many low cost, high impact programs including mobile training teams, combined training exercises, personnel exchange programs, and humanitarian and civic action programs, including infrastructure building and repairs, and medical and dental clinics employing non-combat, primarily Reserve force military personnel. In addition, counterdrug and counterinsurgency equipment and training have greatly enhanced host nation military capabilities and effectiveness.³⁶ Short term Reserve and National Guard civic action projects have rotated over 49,000 U.S. personnel through the SOUTHCOM AOR in the past 7 years, generating tremendous goodwill by working with host nations to achieve meaningful and easily identifiable goals.³⁷

Another low cost, high impact tool for SOUTHCOM has been the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, which trains foreign students in technical skills, while establishing personal relationships that provide future access to civilian and military leaders.³⁸ In FY 92, for a little over \$3 million in IMET funds, the U.S. trained over 400 foreign students.³⁹

The limiting factor for SOUTHCOM in the maritime portion of their efforts is the scarcity of organic naval assets. SOUTHCOM naval forces consist of Navy Special Warfare Unit 26 and Navy Special Warfare Unit 8, a Marine Corps Security

Company, and the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (SCIATSS), all located at Rodman Naval Station at the Pacific terminus of the Panama Canal.⁴⁰ With the exception of SCIATTS, all of these forces are primarily concerned with protection of the Panama Canal.

CHAPTER IV

COAST GUARD SUPPORT TO SOUTHCOM

Historical Coast Guard Naval Support

The Coast Guard has been involved in support of U.S. Navy missions throughout its 203 year existence, including participation in every major U.S. conflict, but for the purposes of this paper it is appropriate to look at more recent history. The Coast Guard has engaged in forward presence operations for over 30 years. As a part of the UNITAS/WATC training exercises, Coast Guard cutters and small boats have accompanied U.S. Naval forces during annual 6 month deployments throughout Latin America and West Africa. Conducting training classes and naval exercises with host nation military forces, the UNITAS/WATC participants cover a wide spectrum of nation assistance topics, particularly military professionalism and competence, while forging close ties with military counterparts in dozens of countries.

The capability of the Coast Guard to act as a brown water adjunct to the U.S. Navy was clearly demonstrated in the Republic of Vietnam in the 1960's, when squadrons of Coast Guard patrol boats and larger cutters served during the Vietnam War. Patrol boats crews conducted Operation Market Time, interdicting the flow of enemy weapons and supplies from the north, while larger Coast Guard cutters patrolled the coastline, providing naval gunfire support. Patrol boats were also closely involved with U.S. Special Forces, inserting and

recovering SEAL and recon units in the rivers and estuaries, and supporting Green Beret camps with supplies, emergency evacuation, transportation, and occasionally gunfire support.

The Coast Guard also supported the war effort ashore, with Port Security personnel and Explosive Ordnance Detachments supervising the safe handling of dangerous cargoes in both U.S. and South Vietnamese ports. Additionally, Coast Guardsmen maintained buoy systems, LORAN navigation stations, and conducted humanitarian civic action programs in the hamlets.⁴¹ These myriad missions of the Coast Guard in Vietnam reflect only a portion of its current capability.

The Department of Defense clearly recognizes the unique importance of the Coast Guard contribution to national defense. In 1982, a Department of Transportation study group proposed removing the Coast Guard's statutory requirement to transfer to the Navy in time of war, looking toward civilianizing the service as a budget cutting measure. It was the strong efforts of the Department of Defense and the National Security Council that headed off this idea, citing the importance of Coast Guard wartime mission capabilities of interdiction, Search and Rescue (SAR), and port security.⁴²

Other Coast Guard mission capabilities were reflected during the March 1989 grounding of the M/V Exxon Valdez, when the USCGC Rush acted as afloat coordinator and Air Traffic Control center in the busy skies and waters of Prince William Sound throughout the long cleanup operation.⁴³

In 1981, the Coast Guard began sending attaches to American embassies in Latin American countries to assist their naval and coast guard forces in numerous areas, including identifying training and equipment needs, and conducting counterdrug activities. Currently, Coast Guard attaches are in place in Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Haiti; and liaison officers and long term training efforts are ongoing in Costa Rica and Panama. Perhaps of the greatest impact, though, is the Coast Guard Mobile Training Team effort, which has been sending small teams of Coast Guard experts to countries throughout the Caribbean, conducting one on one training in everything from navigation and underway operations to small boat motor maintenance.⁴⁴

In each of the countries where Coast Guard training missions have taken place, the Coast Guard has worked closely with the regional CINC, offering its unique capabilities and coordinating its contributions. As a result of engagement with Coast Guard trainers, many third world navies have begun using the U.S. Coast Guard training and organizational model to develop their own organizations. In 1993 alone, 32 Coast Guard training and assistance teams travelled to 24 countries worldwide, including Honduras.⁴⁵

Coast Guard Mission Areas

In his 1992 book, The U.S. Coast Guard's National Security Role in the Twenty First Century, Coast Guard Captain

Bruce Stubbs interviewed dozens of senior Coast Guard and Navy officers regarding their views of the Coast Guard's place in the post-Cold War era. Captain Stubb's analysis revealed four broad mission areas unique to the Coast Guard as a military maritime law enforcement agency: **safety**, including aids to navigation and vessel safety; **law enforcement**, including interdiction and enforcement of laws and treaties; **environmental protection**, including prevention as well as supervising clean-up operations; and **political-military**, including nation-building, and port safety and security.⁴⁶

The extraordinary flexibility and adaptability of the Coast Guard in performing these newly defined but historically performed missions was reflected during recent natural disasters in the United States. Coast Guard units worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide emergency logistics, communications, and other support following Hurricane Andrew in south Florida (1992) and the earthquake in southern California (1993).⁴⁷ In the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo in 1988, Coast Guard cutters evacuated hundreds of people from St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin islands from conditions of virtual anarchy, demonstrating a non-combatant evacuation (NEO) capability readily adaptable to most third world ports.

In a recent interview with Navy Time, RADM Richard A. Applebaum, the head of the Coast's Guard's **Office of Law Enforcement and Defense Operations** noted that the implementation of the U.S. Navy's "...From the Sea" strategy

has freed the Coast Guard from its wartime ASW mission. Looking to the future, RADM Applebaum sees the Coast Guard's new national defense missions closely matching its law enforcement missions of port control, maritime interdiction, and environmental defense. In addition, as the Defense Department downsizes and the budgets tighten, RADM Applebaum sees a need for the Coast Guard to expand its training and security assistance to foreign nations;⁴⁸ offsetting reduced DoD capabilities with low cost, high impact foreign engagement.

Why Central America?

The United States and the second tier countries of the world, including France, Great Britain, the former Soviet Union, operate in a high technology arena. Stealth technology, high performance aircraft, sea-skimming missiles, and increasingly quiet submarine technology, and electronic wizardry throughout the world and in space require a high technology response to stay ahead of threats. In the third world, particularly the countries in the SOUTHCOM AOR, the military operates in a low technology environment. In Central America in particular, the military, especially the maritime forces, are in need of the most basic of military assistance. Frequently boots and uniforms are the primary needs, followed by elementary seamanship, maintenance and navigation skills.⁴⁹ This situation creates a very inexpensive way for the U.S. to

gain influence, build trust, and establish meaningful and far reaching professional relationships.

In the economic arena, one of the biggest problems for Latin America is their inability to protect their territorial seas, much less 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zones. In Central America, this inadequacy is particularly acute due to the potential benefits of fisheries resources. Currently, many countries sell their fishing rights to vast foreign fleets, which rapidly deplete their stocks before moving on.⁵⁰ Development of strong host nation maritime enforcement forces would go far in protecting resources, enforcing catch limits and licensing, and supporting and encouraging the development of domestic fisheries as an economic resource.

In the worldwide struggle with the illicit drug trade, the Central American militaries face forces far beyond their capability. The international drug trade handles billions of dollars worth of drugs every year, moving primarily toward the United States with major trafficking routes around, over, and through the Central American landmass. Countering drug trafficking is an extraordinary and increasingly difficult effort. As Central America analyst and author Carlos Vilas reflects,

"By its clandestine nature, the drug trade requires control of airspace, customs, ports and airports, maritime routes and coasts - activities that in

every country of the world are the responsibility of the armed forces or bodies under their control."⁵¹

In Central America, the problem of port and sea control, as well as the temptation of drug-related corruption, is especially difficult and undeveloped.

Interaction between U.S. military members and their counterparts in host nation militaries provides much more than the easily identifiable benefits of training and equipment. It gives us the chance to pass on our values and ideals, and demonstrate the role of a professional armed force under civilian leadership. Improved professionalism through continued engagement with the military services in Central America is potentially SOUTHCOM's greatest potential contribution to the region. ⁵²

Geographically, Central America is part of America's "back yard," yet the average American knows little about it. In the greater scheme of things, the conflicts, insurgencies, drug problems, and human rights abuses of the relatively small countries pale when compared to other parts of the world. The inability of their governments and military forces to effectively deal with their problems indicates a desperate need for nation-building efforts. Given the historic precedence for U.S. interest in, and protectiveness toward, the region make the U.S. the logical entity to provide those efforts. With the drawdown in DoD and the paucity of maritime assets in SOUTHCOM, these needs must remain largely unmet.

Why the Coast Guard?

The Coast Guard has a recent, though limited, history of engagement in Central America. In 1991, for example, Coast Guard forward presence operations included: training teams to virtually every Latin American country; Coast Guard attaches in the Contadora Group countries of Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia; security assistance personnel in Panama and Costa Rica; and combined operations with the navies of Panama, Guatemala, Honduras and Belize.⁵³ With the drawdown of DoD forces and the massive budget cuts facing DoD planners, the Defense Department is simply not going to be able to do everything that it has in the past. In apportioning its assets, SOUTHCOM has the opportunity to turn over the responsibility for maritime portion of its Theater Strategic Objectives in Central America to a capable, available, and appropriate force: the U.S. Coast Guard.

Although the Coast Guard is small, its personnel and cutters have been operating in the Caribbean for years, primarily conducting drug interdiction activities. Although hampered by the occasional migrant interdiction crises, such as the Mariel boatlift in 1980 and the current operation off the coast of Haiti, Coast Guard cutters have maintained a frequent presence off Central America's Caribbean coast, and more recently, Pacific coast. In the coming years, the Coast Guard can fulfill new roles in Central America, including coastal and riverine warfare capability, interdiction and

surveillance, U.S. naval presence, and increased security assistance training. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the Coast Guard can expand SOUTHCOM's Flexible Deterrent Options due to the unique capabilities and the humanitarian image of the service.⁵⁴

The submarine and coastal missile and mine threats envisioned as the major challenges for the Navy in "...From the Sea" simply don't exist in Central America. As outlined in Appendix I, the entire maritime forces of Central America consist of approximately 3600 personnel, and 50 coastal patrol boats and 100 riverine and other craft, ranging from ex-Soviet hulks to Boston whalers and former USCG 82 patrol boats. Based on the lack of training and maintenance capability, and the logistical problems of supporting machinery from dozens of makes and models of vessels, the operational capability of those vessels is surely well under 50%, and probably much lower.

The Coast Guard has much more in common than the U.S. Navy with Central American and other Third World maritime forces. Despite the emergence of some new naval threats from countries acquiring state of the art weapons systems, what is obsolete to them (and the U.S. Navy) is actually more appropriate to the third rate countries and the Coast Guard.⁵⁵ With the primary missions of most of the world's navies being non-blue water sea control and SAR, the Coast Guard is a

perfect fit where the U.S. Navy, even if available, is an overwhelming, and frequently threatening, force.⁵⁶

One of the biggest problems with the Grenada invasion in 1983 was the lack of local knowledge.⁵⁷ Critical operational information can only be developed through area awareness and familiarity, and the best way to achieve that is to be there. Although beach reconnaissance by trained intelligence personnel is always preferable, it isn't always feasible due to time constraints, as was the case in Grenada. Every Coast Guard training team visit leaves 2-10 personnel very familiar with the people and the area of each location they have worked in. Catalogued documentation of these visits would provide an extraordinarily valuable database of contingency information for future SOUTHCOM crisis responses.

The participants of Global 93 noted in their report that the downsizing and possible elimination of SOUTHCOM reflected a need to get the Coast Guard more involved in Latin America for nation building, drug interdiction, controlling migration, disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and professional military training.⁵⁸ In addition to filling the gap left by DoD downsizing, as CAPT Stubbs so aptly put it: "The Coast Guard is more relevant to the majority of the world's navies in terms of force mix and missions...making the Coast Guard ideal for small navy security assistance."⁵⁹ In Latin America, and especially in Central America, this is particularly true.

In addition, the Coast Guard presents less of a threat than the presence of a DoD warship or aircraft. During the Mariel Boatlift, Coast Guard cutters patrolled directly off the coast of Cuba, creating a buffer between the Cuban Coast Guard and Navy warships in the Straits of Florida. In Haiti in December 1991, a small Coast Guard CASA logistics plane evacuated the U.S. ambassador in a low threat answer to a potentially high threat problem.⁶⁰ A U.S. Air Force jet may well have signalled an misunderstood intention. A U.S. Coast Guard asset is less of a threat to another country's sovereignty and sensitivities during a regional crisis, yet still demonstrates U.S. resolve and commitment.⁶¹

A further benefit of assigning the Coast Guard to SOUTHCOM's maritime responsibilities involves language. Although DoD forces operate worldwide and require fluency in dozens of languages to function, the vast majority of Coast Guard personnel operate in areas where the primary languages are English or Spanish. As graduates of "total immersion" language training will attest, there is no better way to learn a language than to speak it conversationally with native speakers. A combination of classroom training and heavy engagement in Central America would expose many Coast Guard personnel to increased Spanish language capability. The emergence of a bilingual U.S. naval force throughout the Americas would only increase the benefits of, as well as facilitate, increased involvement in the region.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As the new regionally-focused multi-polar world order develops, and the Department of Defense downsizes in response to the effective evaporation of the Soviet threat, it is critical that the United States continue to provide forward presence and positive engagement to maintain influence in the world. The use of multi-national exercises, humanitarian assistance and nation building efforts provide assurance to our friends and allies, as well as a warning to potential enemies, that we can and will back up our alliances.⁶²

As the United States downsizes and realigns DoD forces in response to changing national security priorities, the Coast Guard must also reassess its roles and missions in support of national security.⁶³ The Coast Guard's primary Cold War responsibility of operating the Maritime Defense Zone has shriveled to essentially protecting against an import terrorist threat. The need for a Coast Guard military, vice law enforcement, capability in the future will depend on whether the Coast Guard is employed as a national security regional contingency force for coastal/littoral operations. Lack of any support infrastructure in the rest of the world, as the phaseout of the worldwide LORAN navigation system negates the need for a large Coast Guard presence in Europe and the Pacific, leaves Latin America and the Caribbean as the

only logical places for Coast Guard forward presence and engagement.⁶⁴

Although the Coast Guard is already actively involved in Central America, as I have discussed, it has been on a limited and ad-hoc basis due at least partly to budget constraints. The impetus behind formally recognizing and tasking the Coast Guard's capability to be the SOUTHCOM naval force would be to recognize a specific and appropriate national defense mission for the Coast Guard which replaces the previous MDZ responsibilities. This, in turn, would create an avenue to secure separate Congressional funding for a demonstrably low cost, high impact program which will promote American ideals in Latin America while establishing a long term, coordinated yet non-threatening U.S. military presence. Since Navy presence in Central America (other than Rodman Naval Station in Panama) is already relatively small, consisting primarily of periodic port calls, the Coast Guard contribution in Central America should be viewed by the Navy as a complementary, vice competitive effort.

Changing demographics in our hemisphere increase the importance of U.S. engagement in Latin America. Although Latin America and the United States had comparable populations at the end of WWII, estimates reflect that by 2010, Latin America will have double the size of the U.S. population, creating a potentially serious threat from economic migrant movements, environmental pollution, and disputes between and

among neighboring countries.⁶⁵ As SOUTHCOM's naval force, operating and engaging first in the Central American region, and later deeper into Latin America, the Coast Guard can enter the 21st century ready and able to fulfill SOUTHCOM's strategic objectives in the Americas in an appropriate, cost effective, and mutually beneficial relationship with our neighbors to the south, trusted to help resolve their security problems and respected, but not feared.

Central American Navies/Patrol Forces (Including PM and BH)

Costa Rica

Personnel: 160

Bases: Pacific: Golfito, Puntarenas
Atlantic: Puerto Limon

Vessels: 1 - 105' Swift CPC (Coastal Patrol Craft)
1 - 95' CPC (Ex-USCG)
1 - 82' CPC
4 - 65' Swift CPC
2 - 36' Swift
8 - Boston Whalers

Guatemala

Personnel: 530

Bases: Pacific: Sipacate, Puerto Quetzal
Atlantic: San Tomas de Castillo

Vessels: 1 - 105' Broadsword CPC
2 - 85' Sewart CPC
6 - 65' Cutlass CPC
2 - 36' Troop carriers
16 - Riverine craft

Honduras

Personnel: 900

Bases: Puerto Cortes, Amapala, Puerto Castilla,
La Ceiba, Puerto Trujillo

Vessels: 2 - 106 Guardian CPC
3 - 105' Swift CPC (Fast Attack)
1 - 85' CPC
5 - 65' Swift CPC
1 - Landing craft
10 - Troop carriers
10 - 36' River patrol craft
12 - 25' Boston Whalers

Source: Jane's Fighting Ships, 1993.

El Salvador

Personnel: 850

Bases: Ajacutla, La Libertad, El Triunfo y La Union

Vessels:

- 3 - 100' CPC
- 1 - 77' Swift CPC (Fast Attack)
- 1 - 65' Swift CPC
- 6 - 36' river patrol boats
- 3 - Landing craft
- 10 - Troop carriers
- 10 - 40' river patrol boats

Nicaragua

Personnel: 800

Vessels:

- 1 - 93' CPC
- 3 - 80' CPC (Ex-Soviet Inshore minehunters)
- 4 - 55' Ex-Soviet Minesweepers (inoperable)
- 7 - 75' Zhuk CPC (3 operational)
- 8 - 72' Ex-NK CPC (3 operational)
- 2 - 67' Ex-NK CPC (0 operational)
- 2 - 65' Ex-Israeli CPC (0 operational)

Panama

Personnel: 280

Bases: Flamenco Island, Coco Solo

Vessels:

- 2 - 103' Vosper Large Patrol Craft
- 1 - 87' CPC/Minesweeper)
- 1 - 82' CPC (Ex-USCG)
- 1 - 65' Swift CPC
- 3 - 57' CPC/minesweepers
- 4 - 74' LCM

Belize

Personnel: 50

Bases: Belize City, Punta Gorda

Vessels:

- 2 - 65' CPC
- 8 - small boats

SUMMARY - CENTRAL AMERICAN NAVIES/PATROL FORCES

<u>Country</u>	<u>Personnel</u>	<u>CPC/RPC/Other</u>
Costa Rica	160	7 10 0
Guatemala	530	9 16 2
Honduras	900	11 22 11
El Salvador	850	5 26 3
Nicaragua	800	11
Panama	280	8 4
<u>Belize</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>2 8</u>
Total	3570	53 82 20

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